A new claimant to the leadership of Lebanon's Shî'îs is 'Allâma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallâh, patron of the radical »Party of God« *(Ḥizballâh)*. Faḍlallâh was born in the Iraqi Shî'î shrine city of Najaf in 1935. His father, the late Âyatallâh 'Abd ar-Ra'ûf Faḍlallâh of 'Aynâtâ in South Lebanon, came to Najaf in 1928 in pursuit of religious learning, and remained there for nearly thirty years. His son, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, passed his formative years in Najaf's climate of scholastic piety, studying under the leading Shî'î theologians of the day. Najaf at the time was also a center of Shî'î intellectual ferment and subversive activity surrounding the call for an Islamic state in Iraq, and Faḍlallâh undoubtedly heard the arguments for Islamic revolution. But he also felt the moderating influence of his own teacher, Âyatallâh Abû'l-Qâsim Khô'î, who refused to immerse himself in politics. It was Khô'î who accredited Faḍlallâh as a *mujtahid*.

Faḍlallâh arrived in Lebanon in 1966, and settled in the mixed Palestinian-Shî'î quarter of Nab'a in East Beirut. He began his mission in communal work, establishing a social and cultural association in his *ḥusaynîya* which sponsored clinics, youth clubs, and a preparatory school for *'ulamâ'*. In Nab'a, Faḍlallâh produced his best scholarship, composing his two most significant tracts: *Uslûb ad-da'wa fî'l-Qur'ân* and *Mantiq al-quwwa fî'l-Islâm*. His lucid writings and preaching established him as a brilliant theologian, although he did not yet delve in politics.

In 1976, the Phalangist militia besieged the Palestinians in Nab'a, and the entire Shî'î population of the quarter fled the fighting. Faḍlallâh was forced to abandon the labor of a decade. He briefly preached in Bint Jubayl in South Lebanon, but soon returned to Beirut, setting to work in the city's southern, predominantly Shî'î suburbs. It was apparently at this time that Âyatallâh Khô'î appointed Faḍlallâh his personal representative *(wakîl)* in Lebanon. Khô'î had come to be widely recognized as *marja'* by Lebanon's Shî'îs, and Faḍlallâh gained much authority through the appointment. In Khô'î's name, Faḍlallâh established a large charitable institution *(mabarra)* in Beirut, which today includes an orphanage, mosque, and school. By virtue of his own credentials and resources, Faḍlallâh acted independently of Imâm Sayyid Mûsâ aṣ-Ṣadr, whom he may have regarded as an adversary. But in conformity with Khô'î's example, Faḍlallâh shunned open political controversy.

The Iranian Revolution radicalized many of Lebanon's Shî'îs; Faḍlallâh described the event as »an earthquake«. In response, Faḍlallâh now dissociated himself from Khô'î's political quietism: he apologized for Khô'î by stressing the futility of overt opposition in Iraq, but announced that »just as I have ties with Khô'î, so I have ties with Imâm Khomeinî«. Faḍlallâh began to visit Iran frequently, where he was received with much enthusiasm. His preaching from his own pulpit — the Imâm Riḍâ mosque in Beirut's Bi'r al 'Abd quarter — dealt increasingly with resistance to imperialism in all its

forms, and he began to gather a political following. The radical Lebanese Muslim Students Union *(al-ittiḥâd al-lubnânî li't-ṭalaba al-muslimîn),* founded by Shî'î students at the Arab University of Beirut, made Faḍlallâh their patron, and filled their journal, *al-Muntalaq,* with his teaching. Faḍlallâh apparently enjoyed a similar position in the Lebanese branch of the underground Iraqi *Ḥizb ad-Da'wa,* originally composed of Iraqi Shî'î émigrés and Najaf-educated Lebanese Shî'îs. Faḍlallâh's ties with *Ḥizb ad-Da'wa* had roots in his own Najaf experience. He had studied under Âyatallâh Muḥsin al-Ḥakîm, whose sons now lead *Ḥizb ad-Da'wa* from Iranian exile, and he may also be related to the Ḥakîm family. Faḍlallâh has frequently called for the overthrow of the Iraqi regime, which he has accused of having attempted to assassinate him.

The Israeli invasion gave further impetus to Faḍlallâh's rise. His preaching against the Israeli occupation, the Multinational Force (MNF), and the government of Amin Gemayel, suited the rising mood of Shî'î resistance. It also had direct consequences. The organizations operating under his patronage conducted an active *jihâd* against Israeli forces in South Lebanon, with his open encouragement. Some accounts of the October 1983 suicide attacks on the American and French MNF contingents in Beirut also reported that Faḍlallâh granted religious dispensation to the suicide bombers on the eve of their mission. Faḍlallâh called the report »too ridiculous to be denied«, although he justified the attacks as »heroic«. This episode's importance for Faḍlallâh lay in his new fame and notoriety: in a barrage of interviews, he mixed denials of involvement in the attacks with detailed presentations of his political views.

After 1983, Iran became involved more deeply in Lebanon. Those Shî'îs in Beirut who were swept up in this Iranian-backed activity called themselves *Ḥizballâh,* a name already employed by Iranian-supported Shî'îs in the Biqâ'. This group then formed an alliance with Faḍlallâh's own followers, and *Ḥizballâh* became the accepted designation for their coalition. *Ḥizballâh* has enjoyed extensive Iranian support, extended through various channels, and Faḍlallâh has emerged as its patron. Faḍlallâh himself denies holding any formal position in *Ḥizballâh,* admitting only that its activists have been inspired by his preaching. The actual spokesman for *Ḥizballâh* in Beirut is a lesser figure, Shaykh Ibrâhîm al-Amîn. But it is due to Faḍlallâh's undeniable influence upon *Ḥizballâh* that he has become a force in Lebanese politics. Faḍlallâh conducts what amounts to the diplomacy of a militia leader. Most of his political contacts are with Iran, Syria, *amal* leader Nabîh Birrî, Supreme Islamic Shî'î Council Vice-Chairman Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdî Shams ad-Dîn, and Islamic *tawḥîd* leader Shaykh Sa'îd Sha'bân of Tripoli. At the same time, determined opponents of *Ḥizballâh* have targeted Faḍlallâh, as demonstrated by the car bomb attack near his home in March 1985, in which he narrowly escaped death.

Faḍlallâh has a shrewd sense of the balance of power in Lebanon, the region, and the world. His ultimate aims are the establishment of an Islamic government in Lebanon, the destruction of Israel, and the eradication of imperialism in the Muslim world. But »we are realists« he declares, placing the attainment of these aims in the distant future. Faḍlallâh's positions thus represent a Lebanese interpretation of Shî'î activism, which makes some tactical allowance for Lebanon's heterogeneity, Israel's power, and the West's resolve to defend essential interests. Most notable are his repeated assertions that Lebanon is not yet ready for Islamic government, and that Islamic resistance from Lebanon will not suffice to liberate Palestine. Faḍlallâh has admitted that this approach has recently created some tension in his relationship with Iran. But he continues to maintain that his understanding of the Arab and Lebanese predicament is grounded

more firmly in reality than that of Iran's would-be experts. The way in which this tension is ultimately resolved is very likely to determine the future course of *Ḥizballâh* and Shi'î radicalism in Lebanon.

Martin Kramer

Martin Kramer, "Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah," *Orient* (Opladen, West Germany), vol. 26, no. 2 (June 1985), pp. 147-149.